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Snohomish County in line for new courthouse

Snohomish County commissioners have approved the building of a new courthouse to replace the 1967 courthouse annex now being used. Property taxes will be increased to pay for it.

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Snohomish County will finally be getting a new courthouse, which has been in the planning stages for years.

On Monday, the Snohomish County Council voted 3-2 in favor of building a \$150 million, nine-story structure on property adjacent to Comcast Arena, at the corner of Wall Street and Oakes Avenue.

Councilmembers Stephanie Wright, Dave Somers and Brian Sullivan voted for the new courthouse. Councilmembers Dave Gossett and John Koster were opposed.

The council also approved a 0.42 percent property-tax increase to pay for the courthouse, which will amount to \$19 extra in property taxes a year for a house assessed at \$223,000, beginning in 2014, said Councilmember Dave Somers.

“I think there is no question we have to replace the existing courthouse,” he said. “It’s antiquated and has structural issues.”

The new courthouse will include room for superior and district courts, the clerk’s office, the office of public defense and the prosecuting attorney’s office. Environmentally friendly building methods will be used, and the structure will be constructed to higher seismic standards and have enhanced security, according to the plans.

It will be a 161,000-square-foot facility with 20 courtrooms, the same as the current courthouse.

The new courthouse is expected to be completed in early 2017. At that time, the existing 1967 courthouse annex to the Mission Building will be demolished.

The Mission Building, which is still used by the Snohomish County Superior Court, will not only be preserved but will get \$2.6 million in mechanical, electrical and architectural upgrades from the \$150 million project. Built more than 100 years ago, it is listed on both the state and federal Register of Historic Places.

“We’re not sure what we’ll do with it,” Somers said. “Could be offices. Could be a museum ... maybe a community center.”

The new courthouse design was under way last spring, but the council held off on finalizing it so that County Executive John Lovick, who was sworn in in June, could weigh in on the decision.

In August 2009, the county held an open house to celebrate the Mission Building's centennial anniversary. The building was designed by Carl Siebrand and August F. Heide, architects of many buildings in Everett's downtown and residential neighborhoods. The Mission Building was built between 1909 and 1911 to replace an earlier one destroyed by fire on Aug. 2, 1909.

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